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The five hundred and eighty-third meeting of the Club was held at the Rembrandt Hotel, S.W.7. 20th September, 1960.

Chairman: C. R. S. Pitman.

Members present, 28; Guests, 4; Guest of the Club, Dr. and Mrs. R. K. Dell, Total, 34.

Influence of man on the birds of New Zealand

by DR. R. K. DELL

An account of a talk given to the Club on 20th September, 1960

An account of the total effect of man on the birds of New Zealand would be a complete ornithology of the country. The following account therefore will deal with some general aspects of the topic with an attempt to draw comparisons with the British Isles when applicable.

The history of European colonization extends over a little more than a hundred years. In that time the lowland countryside has been completely altered, as has much of the accessible hill country, and much of the rest of the land has been modified to some extent. Until some forty years or so back, any account such as this would have been largely the story of the extinction of some species, the increasing rarity of others, the exploitation of some species and intentional or purposeless interference with many. Any forecast for the future would have implied the rapid replacement of a native avifauna by introduced species.

Until recently the most noticeable feature of New Zealand from an ecological view point would have been its lack of stability and complete lack of balance between man and his activities, and the landscape, plant cover and associated animals. There are signs that such a balance is being achieved in some areas but one of the most marked contrasts between New Zealand and the British Isles would still be the degree of difference in ecological balance. This is largely due to the fact that the changes that have taken place gradually in the British Isles over the last 2,000 years have been compressed in New Zealand into a mere 100 years.

The effects of man on the New Zealand avifauna may be considered under the following heads:

1. The influence of native peoples on the birds. Maori settlement dates from a series of migrations stretching probably from about A.D. 925

to A.D. 1350. The Maoris probably assisted in the extinction of the giant flightless birds, the Moas. In general they used birds for food and their feathers and skins for clothing but probably altered the environment only slightly. It is estimated that there were about 200,000 Maoris in New Zealand at the time of European discovery.

2. The period of European discovery and exploitation, 1642 to 1840. Little real effect apart from the introduction of the pig which became wild.

3. The period of European settlement, 1840 to present. The effects upon the birds may be summarised under the following heads:

- (a) very rapid and widespread alteration to the plant cover.
- (b) introduction of active predators such as rats, stoats, weasels, cats and dogs.
- (c) introduction of other species which have assisted in radically changing the plant cover e.g. deer of many species, opossums and domestic animals which have since become wild, e.g. cattle, horses, goats, etc.
- (d) introduction of active competitors. Thirty five species of birds have been successfully introduced.
- (e) increased exploitations for food. The human population has greatly increased.
- (f) the complete destruction of some areas as bird habitats.
- (g) the collection of some of the rarer species for scientific or pseudo-scientific purposes.

The immediate result was the rapid disappearance of many, if not all native species from settled localities. Many species became very rare and some became extinct.

Counter measures were gradually instituted. The first major step was blanket protection but this has been followed by active conservation, the establishment of sanctuaries and most important an active policy of education about birds through the schools and other agencies. Research into some of the species is gradually supplying information that will allow conservation to be based upon scientific knowledge.

For one cause or another, there are signs that over the last forty years or so a number of native species have succeeded in adapting themselves to the very changed ecological conditions, while many others are surviving and becoming more plentiful in marginal areas. Some of the terrestrial forms will probably fail to survive except in sanctuaries but some of our isolated species are apparently proving more adaptable than had at first been feared, so that the ways in which specialised species may survive changed ecological conditions may be studied.

Recent records from north-western Northern Rhodesia

PART TWO

by MR. C. W. BENSON

Received 17th February, 1960

Prinia flavicans bihe Boulton & Vincent.

2♂, 16th/18th September, 2♂X, 6♀, o, 18th/20th November, Lungwembungu; ♂X, 24th November, South Kashiji.